

June 21, 2014

First Nations Languages, Alive and Celebrated at the Royal BC Museum

Victoria, BC – The Royal BC Museum and the First Peoples' Cultural Council are pleased to announce the opening of ***Our Living Languages: First Peoples' Voices in BC*** today – National Aboriginal Day. This new exhibition celebrates the rich diversity of First Nations languages in our province and tells the remarkable story of the resilience of language in the face of change.

With 34 unique First Nations languages and 61 dialects, BC is widely regarded as a linguistic “hot-spot”. But in past decades the vitality of Indigenous languages has been threatened in First Nations communities here, as they have been around the world. ***Our Living Languages*** explores and explains how culture is inextricably linked to language, and how First Nations language activists have ensured languages are kept alive for future generations of speakers.

The exhibition is a unique partnership between the Royal BC Museum and the First Peoples' Cultural Council (FPCC), who signed a Memorandum of Understanding in February 2013 to work together on this exciting project.

In developing the exhibition, FPCC's key role has been to ensure an authentic experience by providing advice on cultural matters, shaping the narrative and working closely with **BC's First Nations communities** and language experts to develop and gather content.

“We are very pleased to partner with the Royal BC Museum on this initiative,” **said FPCC Executive Director Tracey Herbert.** **“Language is integral to culture.** By showcasing **BC's** Indigenous languages, as well as the living people who are speaking and teaching them, the exhibition provides a window into the world of BC First Nations, not just historically, **but as they are today.”**

The Royal BC Museum's role has been to find the most compelling way to communicate the stories about First Nations languages through design, in a space where British Columbians – and visitors from abroad – can learn more about this important issue. The exhibition integrates motifs derived from traditional First Nations art, craft, and environment to support the themes of language's vulnerability, vitality and centrality to culture.

“The Royal BC Museum celebrates the rich cultural heritage of British Columbia and actively promotes mutual respect among all our communities,” **said Royal BC Museum CEO Prof. Jack Lohman.** **“The Museum is a bridge between our past and our future, and raising awareness and an appreciation of BC's Indigenous languages is a foundation for the pride we have in our province.”**

In Lohman's eyes the exhibition itself is a bridge, linking the past, of a deeply divided society characterized by untold suffering and injustice, with the future, focused on greater social cohesion. **“The Royal BC Museum's intention is to feature language as a lens**

through which we can understand First Nations cultures as dynamic and living, rather than an anthropological survey,” said Lohman.

“National Aboriginal Day is about honouring, preserving and celebrating the many First Nations, Inuit and Metis cultures throughout our country,” said Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation Minister John Rustad. “Working to preserve and share First Nations languages through opportunities like *Our Living Languages* is an important part of building a new understanding and relationship for us all in British Columbia.”

In an exhibition notable for its strong design, one of the most visually stunning elements of *Our Living Languages* is the feature display of original works of art by three internationally-renowned BC First Nations artists: Francis Dick, Debra Sparrow and Jaalen Edenshaw. All three works are prominently displayed, and will be brought into the Royal BC Museum’s permanent collections when the exhibition closes in June 2017.

Although located in Victoria, the exhibition is relevant for people in virtually every corner of BC. Every First Nations community in the province has dealt with the question of language vitality and struggled to keep its Indigenous culture alive. FPCC is able to connect members of the media with “language champions” throughout the province, if they are interested in developing a local story.

Tickets for *Our Living Languages* are available online or at the Royal BC Museum Box Office. For more information, visit www.royalbcmuseum.bc.ca or call 1-888-447-7977. The Royal BC Museum is open daily from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. with extended summer hours 10 a.m. to 10 p.m. on Fridays and Saturdays from May 23 through September 27.

About the Royal BC Museum

The Royal BC Museum explores the province’s human history and natural history, advances new knowledge and understanding of BC, and provides a dynamic forum for discussion and a place for reflection. The museum and archives celebrate culture and history, telling the stories of BC in ways that enlighten, stimulate and inspire. Looking to the future, by 2017 the Royal BC Museum will be a refreshed, modern museum, extending its reach far beyond its two-hectare campus in Victoria as a world-class cultural venue and repository of digital treasures.

About the First Peoples’ Cultural Council

The First Peoples’ Cultural Council (FPCC) is a BC Crown corporation with the mandate to support First Nations in their efforts to revitalize their languages, arts, cultures and heritage. FPCC has distributed more than \$22 million to BC Aboriginal communities over the past 23 years. For more information, please visit www.fpcc.ca

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